

# A grandparent's guide to supporting breastfeeding



Public Health  
Agency

**Congratulations! You are about to become a grandparent or perhaps your grandchild has just been born. This leaflet is for grandparents like you who want to support a daughter or son's partner who has decided to breastfeed. It will try to answer some questions or concerns you may have.**

Your own children may not have been breastfed, perhaps there wasn't much support and bottlefeeding is what most families did then. We know a lot more now about why breastfeeding is important in giving a child the best possible start in life. The number of women choosing to breastfeed is increasing and there is also better support for mothers.

### **Is breastfeeding really better than bottlefeeding?**

Infant formula is made from cows' milk and therefore it cannot protect a baby from illness the way that breastfeeding can. Breastmilk has everything a baby needs for the first six months and, as well as being the perfect food and drink, it is also like medicine for babies because it has important nutrients, antibodies and hormones which can only be found in the mother's own milk. Research clearly shows that breastfed babies are healthier than bottlefed babies, need fewer visits to the doctor and hospital and have lower risk of:

- ear, chest, stomach, kidney and urinary infections
- severe asthma and eczema
- childhood diabetes and obesity
- sudden infant death (cot death).

Mothers who breastfeed are at lower risk of:

- breast cancer
- ovarian cancer
- osteoporosis (brittle bones).



## How will I know the baby is getting enough milk?

Most women can produce enough milk to fully breastfeed their baby. You don't need to see exactly how much the baby is getting, but you will know that the baby is getting enough milk if, by a week old, they are:



- having six wet nappies a day
- having two or more yellow, runny poos a day
- calm and satisfied after feeds
- starting to regain their birth weight then gaining weight.

## My grandchild seems to be feeding all the time, is this normal?

Getting a good milk supply going involves breastfeeding when the baby shows the first signs of wanting to feed and allowing the baby to decide they have had enough. This is known as 'baby-led' feeding. Babies can't tell the time so strict routines and four hourly feeding schedules are not helpful and will make breastfeeding difficult for both mother and baby.

The average number of feeds is 8–12 in a 24 hour period and each feed may have a different gap of time in between. Sometimes the baby will want to have lots of feeds close together and this is quite normal. Most babies will still need to feed at least once during the night for many months.

## I'm worried that breastfeeding seems to be painful for the mother of my grandchild?

Breastfeeding is a new skill, which can sometimes take time to get right. Pain is usually a sign that the mother needs help getting the baby well positioned and attached for breastfeeding. Encourage her to ask for help from her midwife, health visitor or a breastfeeding counsellor.

Information on how to help the baby attach well to the breast and telephone numbers of where to get help can be found in the booklet *Off to a good start*, which is given to breastfeeding mothers in hospital and is on the website [www.breastfedbabies.org](http://www.breastfedbabies.org)

## If I can't give the baby a bottle, how will I get to know my new grandchild?

After breastfeeding is well established (four to six weeks or so), the mother might decide to express some of her milk and you could give the occasional feed. It's not helpful to suggest giving a bottle of formula as this can reduce the mother's milk supply and may make the baby more likely to get an infection. But there are other things you can do to feel close to your grandchild, such as winding, changing, bathing, soothing and cuddling the baby.



*"In my day not many mums breastfed, but I can now see the benefits for my grandchildren and I'm glad to help any way I can."*

## What else can I do to help?

Supportive grandparents can make a real difference to a new breastfeeding mum. Practical help with cooking, shopping, cleaning and laundry will make such a difference, letting her rest and giving her more time to spend feeding the baby. Also try to:

- be sensitive to her feelings
- avoid giving advice but do listen to her concerns
- encourage her to keep going with breastfeeding
- remind her what an important thing she is doing and how proud you are of her.



## What if she needs to breastfeed when we are with other people or out shopping?

There are many places that are particularly welcoming to breastfeeding families in Northern Ireland; some have joined a scheme known as 'Breastfeeding welcome here'. A full list of businesses and council facilities who are members are listed on [www.breastfedbabies.org](http://www.breastfedbabies.org)

If the mother wears a loose top that can be lifted from the waist or uses a shawl or blanket, it is possible to breastfeed without anyone noticing. You can support her by sitting with her and chatting to her while she is feeding.



## Where can I get more information and support with breastfeeding?

There are lots of breastfeeding support groups throughout Northern Ireland. Grandparents are very welcome.

Some areas have breastfeeding peer support volunteers (mothers who have breastfed themselves and who have been trained to offer support to other mothers).

To find out about local breastfeeding groups and peer support volunteers, talk to the midwife or health visitor, visit [www.breastfedbabies.org](http://www.breastfedbabies.org) or call one of the breastfeeding helplines below for friendly advice.

- National Breastfeeding Helpline 0300 100 0212 (9.30am–9.30pm)
- Association of Breastfeeding Mothers 0844 412 2949 (open 9.30am–10.30pm)
- La Leche League 0845 120 2918 (24 hours)
- National Childbirth Trust 0300 330 0771 (8.00am–10.00pm)

**Supporting a mother to breastfeed her baby will help them both lead healthier lives.**



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